

COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED VALIDATION OF *CNEMIDOPHORUS SEPTENVITTATUS* COPE, 1882. Z.N.(S.) 1634

(see volume 21, pages 364-365)

By Jay M. Savage (University of Southern California, Los Angeles, U.S.A.)

Request by Dr. Ralph Axtell requesting that the principle of the first reviser be set aside in the case of the names *Cnemidophorus septenvittatus*, and *semifasciatus* seems to be based upon completely subjective criteria rather than principles of nomenclature. Burger as first reviser selected *semifasciatus*. The sole reason for Axtell's request is based upon his subjective evaluation of the relative scientific merit of Burger's paper as opposed to the paper by Duellman and Zweifel. If such reasoning should be consistently employed in substituting for the rules of nomenclature, the very stability that the rules provide will be lost in a morass of subjective evaluation of the relative scientific merit of every paper. To argue that a cornerstone of the rules should be set aside merely because Dr. Axtell thinks that Duellman and Zweifel's contribution is superior to Burger's is totally irrelevant as well as completely subjective. I propose that the Commission should refuse to set aside the principle of the first reviser in this case and indeed in any others that are based upon such subjective evaluation.

By Hobart M. Smith (Department of Zoology, University of Illinois, Urbana, U.S.A.)

The basis for the appeal by Axtell for use of the plenary powers to validate the selection by Duellman and Zweifel of *septenvittatus* as the senior name among the simultaneously proposed names *septenvittatus*, *scalaris* and *semifasciatus*, is maintenance of nomenclatural stability. On exactly the same grounds I here request that the Commission sanction the selection of *scalaris* as the senior name, among the same three, as proposed by Williams and Smith (1963).

The real basis for discontent by the latter authors with Duellman and Zweifel's choice of *septenvittatus* was not simply that Burger's action as first reviser had in reality eliminated *septenvittatus* from consideration—Duellman and Zweifel's choice was understandable since some practising taxonomists dislike (unjustifiably, in my opinion) first reviser rules. Their failure to pay heed to Burger's action is in itself certainly of minor importance and not worth escalation to the status of an issue; nevertheless, the fact that a regulation of the Code was violated would inevitably have required adjustment at some time in the future.

The real reason Williams and Smith objected to selection of *septenvittatus* as the senior name, among these three, was that never, since the original description, had that name been used as the valid name for any taxon at any level (specific or subspecific) prior to Duellman and Zweifel's work (1962), whereas *semifasciatus* had been used as a valid name at least by Burger (1950) and some authors following him (e.g. Smith and Taylor, 1950, Bull. U.S. Nat. Mus., 199 : 184, in their check list and key to the lizards of Mexico), and *scalaris* had been used, as a valid name, by numerous authors and was therefore the logical choice, other factors permitting, for the senior name, on the grounds of general familiarity among herpetologists. Furthermore several of the works using *scalaris* have been of monographic and therefore influential nature.

The point was made by Axtell that Duellman and Zweifel's work is definitive, or at least more nearly so than anyone else's review ("All subsequent work on this group of *Cnemidophorus* will, by necessity, stem from ... [it] ..."), and therefore that their terminology should be accepted, whatever it might be ("It is extremely important, therefore, that the names used in this publication be preserved."). The definitiveness of the work is highly questionable. The genus *Cnemidophorus* is one of the most difficult taxonomic nuts to crack in all reptiles, and there is little reason to hope that Duellman and Zweifel have reached the ultimate truth despite the perfectly acceptable proposition that their review is by far the best yet achieved. Duellman and Zweifel themselves were under no illusion of ultimate truth in proposing their arrangement, as indicated by their comment (p. 207): "We realize, however, that our colleagues may

come, with Shakespeare, to feel that 'Tis the times' plague, when madmen lead the blind' *King Lear*." It is not my intent to belittle their monograph, which indeed marks a highly significant step forward in *Cnemidophorus* taxonomy; the point is simply that as a point of departure their work is different from others only because it is the most recent. This difference will inevitably fade away as time passes and does not justify crystallization of nomenclature because of its present importance. Nomenclatural rearrangement of populations has continued since their work appeared, and will continue to do so. There is every reason to hold it as quite possible that the populations to which the three names in present consideration are now applied will be considered conspecific with others to which still older names have been applied, thus requiring still further changes of specific names.

In such a situation it is unwise to regard any given nomenclatural arrangement as more deserving of sanction, and protection, than any other, for taxonomic stability in this genus is still a long way off. The greatest service to nomenclatural stability is in preservation of the most familiar names, when choices do arise, and it was in this spirit that Williams and Smith elected a course within the framework of the Code to place the greatest nomenclatural emphasis upon *scalaris*, as definitely the most widely-used name among the three in question. The patently erroneous type locality of *septemvittatus*, even though subsequently and arbitrarily revised, lends no weight to the proposal for approval by the Commission of its selection.

Accordingly I hereby request that the Commission deny the appeal for approval of Duellman and Zweifel's selection of *septemvittatus* as the senior name among *septemvittatus*, *semifasciatus* and *scalaris*, and that it uphold the selection by Williams and Smith of *scalaris*.

By Kenneth L. Williams (*Museum of Zoology, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, U.S.A.*)

The use of the combination *Cnemidophorus septemvittatus* as the senior name by Duellman and Zweifel (1962) in preference to either *C. scalaris* or *C. semifasciatus* was an infraction of the Code. Thus, it was necessary to make a correction as done by Williams and Smith (1963) or request the Commission to set aside the rules and validate *septemvittatus* as done by Axtell (1964).

I strongly recommend the selection of *C. scalaris* as the senior name for the following reasons:

- (1) Duellman and Zweifel's work, as they clearly noted, is not the "last word" on this group of lizards. Actually it is not certain that the three names involved belong to the same species, or on the other hand, that other forms with older names are not conspecific. It, thus, is very likely that there may be more name changes in the future.
- (2) *C. scalaris* has been utilized in the literature a number of times, whereas *C. septemvittatus* has not been, prior to Duellman and Zweifel.
- (3) *C. septemvittatus* was associated with an erroneous type locality; this was corrected, but does detract from its choice as senior name.

I recommend that the proposal by Axtell requesting validation of *septemvittatus* as senior name in place of *scalaris* or *semifasciatus* be rejected, and that *scalaris* as proposed by Williams and Smith be approved as the senior name.